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ABSTRACT

Settlers who pushed west over the Great Divide to the shores of the Pacific Ocean found the American West to be an expanse of extreme differences in time, topography, and ways of life. This paper elaborates on several historic sites in the American West. The purpose of the paper is to introduce a series of places to the students and teachers of U.S. history. The paper recommends that interested students pursue a study of the important people and significant events associated with a site. It suggests using the Internet for maps, pictures, photos, and general information. The paper provides a short description of the Western heritage of select sites in Alaska, Arizona, California, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming. (Contains 13 suggestions for further reading.) (BT)

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AMERICA'S HISTORIC WEST

Sites that frequently delighted the senses and at times staggered the imagination were seen as settlers pushed west over the Great Divide to the shores of the Pacific Ocean. Those first to journey, and the multitudes who followed, found the American West to be an expanse of extreme differences in time, topography, and ways of life. From remnants of the Russian fur trade in the Northwest to Washington state's Whitman Mission, the site of a horrific act, and Tombstone, Arizona, with its rough-and-ready past--all were part of the heritage of the West. Offered below are a few of these sites (America's Historic Places 1988; Smithsonian Guides 1998; Exploring America's Historic Places 1997). A short description of some aspect of their western heritage is included. The purpose is to introduce a series of places to the students and teachers of American history. Interested students can pursue a study of the important people and significant events associated with a site in some other manner. The Internet is useful for maps, pictures, photographs, and general information. The site name or a key word or words should be used with a search engine to get started. Murals or dioramas are appropriate for the display of student work. Other possibilities include a oulletin board or written projects, a diary or journal entry or simulated news report.

ALASKA

The fur of the sea otter first brought Russian traders to Alaska in the late 1700s. Most notable among the traders was Alexander Baranof, who in 1791 came to Kodiak Island. The newly

hired administrator of the Shelikhov fur company, Baranof soon had an outpost built on the water's edge. In 1799 the company was given a monopoly in Alaska. That same year Baranof left Kodiak to found Sitka on a few acres of land bought from the Tlingit Indians. By the time he retired in 1818, he had assured Russian dominance of Alaska, until it was sold to the United States in 1867.

In July 1897 news of the first gold to be found in the Klondike region of Canada reached Seattle, Washington. By winter, thousands of fortune seekers had boarded boats destined for Skagway and Dyea in the Alaska panhandle. The trek inland required a steep climb up the coastal mountains to the Yukon River, a relatively easy way by water to the interior. Some traveled White Pass out of Skagway, others chose Chilkoot Trail out of Dyea. Either way each man had to get hundreds of pounds of supplies up the difficult mountain trails.

In 1938 foresters began the retrieval of the decaying totem poles of red cedar found abandoned throughout the coastal forests of the Northwest and in the Ketchikan, Alaska, area. The art of Tlingit and Haida Indian craftsmen was symbolic, with representations of birds, fish, and mammals. Of no religious significance, the poles were used to convey the myths and legends of the Indians. Among the pictured were the raven (the symbol for strength and ability), the bear, the beaver, the eagle, and the whale. Colors came from natural substances: copper for green, charcoal for black, and berries for red. The medium for application was a crushed salmon egg and oil- or fat-based tempera.

ARIZONA

When the mountainous North's Sunset Crater began to erupt in 1064, it sent out a cloud of ash that came down on the land as a layer of thick mulch. In turn, the Sinagua Indians moved into the area, built homes, and planted crops. Of the ruins that remain, the most interesting is the Wupatki pueblo, a hundred-room structure that was several stories high. Most of what the Sinaguas knew of stonework they learned from the Anasazis. From another tribe, the Sinaguas

borrowed an ancient sport which utilized an oval court. Also part of the village was a stone amphitheater that was possibly used for ceremonial gatherings. Then unexpectedly and for reasons unknown, after farming in the area for a hundred years, the Sinaguas left in 1225.

Called the White Dove of the Desert, the current San Xavier del Bac near Tucson was not the one founded in 1700 by Father Eusebio Kino, the Padre on Horseback, an early evangelist who established more than a hundred missions and churches before his death in 1711. In his travels across the area, Father Kino selected the Pima Indian village of Bac, near the opening of an underground stream, as a natural location for one of his first churches. The fate of the first building remains a mystery. Similarly, a second church completed in the 1750s, then deserted after an attack by hostiles, has left no signs of its existence. Even the third structure, which was finished in 1797 after more than a decade of construction, mystifies observers with unanswered questions. Without a doubt it was built to last, but who was the building's designer? And why was one of the towers left unfinished?

Told that all he would find in the perilous Apache country was his final resting place, prospector Ed Schieffelin nevertheless hit pay dirt in 1877 and thus named his claim the Tombstone. But the ore proved poor; it was a later strike in 1878 at the Lucky Cuss that soon had thousands coming to the town. By 1890, though, water leakages had made the shafts too expensive to keep open and the population dropped off. Remembrances of the Earps, Boothill, and the Oriental Saloon are best known. But wealth also brought a desire for higher things, recalled in the courthouse, churches, and a hall for the performing arts. Despite a comeback at the turn of the century, by 1910 Tombstone was a thing of the past.

Mesmerized by tales of cities rich in gold, emeralds, and turquoise, Francisco de Coronado was thirty and a Spanish governor in Mexico when he led a group of explorers into what is now Arizona in 1540. In search of fame, fortune, and converts to the church, he and his assemblage of men and artillery entered Arizona at Sierra Vista. Coming to what is now New Mexico, Coronado found that the cities of gold were nothing more than primitive Indian settlements. For two years he

pressed on, through Texas and Oklahoma, and then through Kansas. Finally, in 1542 he returned to Mexico, a broken man.

CALIFORNIA

Influenced as a New England youth by Charles Darwin's views on natural selection and mutation, Luther Burbank had already made his most famous contribution to science, the Burbank potato, a predecessor to the Idaho Russet, by the time he was thirty. Though Burbank transferred his legal right to ownership for about a hundred dollars before leaving for California in 1875, the new potato in time made millions of dollars for others. In California, Burbank began experimenting on a grand scale. His successes in plant breeding over the years included hundreds of varieties of flowers, including the white Shasta; hundreds of fruits, including the plum; and numerous other grains, nuts, and vegetables. Like his contemporaries in science and industry, Burbank became a celebrity. When his critics berated his inexact methods and sloppy records, he remarked that his only interest was in turning out a better plant. And producing a better product he accomplished with a talent for selecting the three or four plants among many with the potential for surpassing all other specimens in the breeding process.

In 1781 the governor of California gave properties on either side of the Los Angeles River to fifty families. Each family, some Indian, some Spanish, some black, and some of mixed blood had been promised three plots of land to establish the Pueblo de Los Angeles. Within a few short years sun-dried brick homes had replaced the earlier crude huts of willow branches, and farms were thriving. Growth was sporadic, though, with no more than a few thousand people registered in 1850, when California became a state.

Fifty years after the first European explorers arrived in the Western Hemisphere, Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo left Mexico to lay claim to the coast of New Spain for his country. Stepping ashore at Point Loma in San Diego Bay in 1542, he became the first explorer of Portuguese descent

to venture into the interior of what is now California. Though he died within months of his arrival, his expedition carried on, searching out the coastline all the way north to what is now Oregon. By the 1850s coastal shipping had become predictable enough to justify a beacon at Point Loma, and this is where it remained in use until 1891.

When John Muir, founder of the Sierra Club, was not climbing or hiking, he was professing nature's beauty through books and articles. So convincing was he with the public that whole sections of wilderness were set aside as national parks and forests, including Yosemite, the Grand Canyon, Sequoia, and Mount Rainier. In Muir's later life, most of his writing was done from a room on the second floor of a large house built by his father-in-law in 1882 in Martinez, California. Fruit trees still standing on the estate are vestiges of the business that gave Muir the independence financially to dedicate the last half of his life to his preservation activities and to travel.

IDAHO

Prior to the Nez Perce's first contact with whites, when the Lewis and Clark expedition came through in 1805, they lived not far from what is now Spalding, Idaho, fishing for salmon, hunting for deer, and foraging for the camas lily that made up their diet. For most of the next generation, they lived in harmony with the newly arrived white settlers. In 1855 the Nez Perce agreed to a treaty setting aside their homeland as a reservation. When gold was discovered, some agreed to a new treaty that generally limited the size of their holdings. When others refused to sign, skirmishes escalated into war in 1877. Beaten, many of the Nez Perce were taken to Oklahoma while those who remained experienced a permanent change in lifestyle as prospectors, lumberjacks, and homesteaders took over their land.

Located not far from what is now Granite Pass, the City of Rocks in time became an important stopping place for people on the California Trail, the principal land route to Sacramento and the gold fields. For pioneers going west by wagon train, the trail provided an unaffected

roadway, plenty of water, and enough forage for livestock. Granite Pass itself, a mile-wide passage through the mountains, was first tested by settlers in 1843. Prior to taking the pass, it was not uncommon for emigrants to stop among the outcrops that made up the City of Rocks. So unique were the formations that travelers often described them in their diaries. References were made to the Dragon Head, the Giant Toadstool, the Twin Sisters, and Bath Rock, where tradition had it that youth would return to those who bathed in its basin. Travelers also left their names, notes, and massages on the rocks, etched in axle grease.

Awed by the Black Robes, the Catholic brethren who came to the Cataldo area in the 1840s, the Coeur d'Alene Indians welcomed Christianity. Along the Coeur d'Alene River, missionaries working alongside Indians built a classically styled European church. Led by Father Antonio Ravalli, an Italian educated in the academic subjects and prepared both as an engineer and as an artist, workers fashioned an architectural wonder. With only a few basic tools, they made do. Trees were shaped into beams and the columns for the porch were made from logs, with everything held in place by wooden pegs. The interior included canvases of the afterlife brought in from Europe, as well as a painting by the Father himself. Ravalli also carved two wooden statues. And in a final tribute to Italy, he painted the hand-carved wooden centerpiece to look like marble.

MONTANA

Shortly after John Grant herded cattle to the Deer Lodge Valley in the 1850s, gold was discovered. With the arrival of miners, the demand for meat peaked and by 1862 Grant could invest in a new home. But before long he gave in to the urge to move on. In 1866 he sold his business interests to Conrad Kohrs, a meat cutter-once-miner. With his brother, Kohrs founded the Pioneer Cattle Company. By the late 1800s the ranch, which had a hundred thousand head herded on a million acres of land, was sending more beef to the eastern markets than any other in the West.

Sent to explore the Louisiana Purchase, Meriwether Lewis and William Clark took their

expedition north in 1804. While passing the winter in what is now North Dakota, they met Touissant Charboneau, a French trader, and his teenage Shoshoni wife, Sacajawea. Clark hired the two as guides when the expedition left again in the spring. The thirty-one men, one woman, and her two-month-old son, Pomp, meaning chief in Shoshoni, a nickname given to him by Clark, arrived in the Northwest in November 1805. On the return trip, the expedition became two, with Lewis taking an alternate route to the north and Clark following the Yellowstone River. Coming to a large sandstone butte not far from what is now Billings, Clark wrote in his diary, "This rock which I shall call Pompy's Tower is 200 feet high and 400 paces in secumpherance...The nativs have ingraved on the face...the figures of animals and near which I marked my name and the day of the month & year." And thus for many years, the pillar was a waymarker for settlers traveling west.

Gold in the 1860s and silver in the 1870s gave Butte its beginning. But the ore most responsible for a hundred years of growth here was copper. For the mining of a rich deposit in the 1880s paralleled the development of the copper-consuming telephone and electrical power companies. While the mines created thousands of jobs, they also led to the fourteen-year War of the Cooper Kings. In this fight for control of the market, the Anaconda Copper Company emerged as the powerhouse of the industry.

Located as far upstream as riverboats could pass on the Missouri River, Fort Benton was established in 1846 as a fur-trading post. In 1860 the fort became an important stopover for freighters on the Mullan Road, the principal wagon route across the mountains. After 1880 the port prospered as a trading center for commerce on the Whoop-up Trail, which joined the upper Missouri with trading posts in Canada. It was along this road that traders gave forts whiskey sold on the black market to Indians. As the whiskey trade was ended and railroads were built, the riverboats disappeared and the town of Benton emerged as a farming community.

NEVADA

Though gold was found near Virginia City as early as the 1840s, the most important discovery, unearthed in 1859, was the Comstock Lode, a hugely rich deposit of gold and high-grade silver on the slopes of Mount Davidson in the Sierra Nevada. Miners, merchants, and laborers soon came to the area. Schools were built; newspapers were printed; and a high-rise hotel was furnished, complete with the West's first elevator. For twenty years Virginia City was a place where millions of dollars could be made in a fortnight and lost in a day. In a single year, for example, the Truckee Railroad brought in more than forty tons of seafood to satisfy the town's more finicky eaters. And many of the homes that soon appeared were mansions, ornate with superfluous trim. But by 1880 the returns from the mines were diminishing and the town's era of prosperity was coming to a chose.

Located not far from what is now Silver Springs, Fort Churchill was Nevada's first military post. The most anxious moment in its past was the 1860 Paiute Indian attack that led to its beginning. When prospectors kidnapped two Indian women, Paiute revenge was quick to come. Battles followed in which the Indians routed a para-military force of settlers. Army regulars were then sent in from California, and the dissidents were crushed. Having restored order, the army directed a few of its men to remain and establish a garrison on the Carson River. Its purposes were to guard the overland stagecoach and to protect the Pony Express and the transcontinental telegraph. Though an order called for housing of the simplest kind, more than two hundred thousand dollars was put into the fortress. For the next decade its commissioned personnel lived in quarters whose furnishings were said to be as clean as those of the best homes in the East. During the 1860s Fort Churchill's officers were on the alert for instances of secessionist tendencies, but these were few. Then in 1866 the fort was downsized to an armory. A few years later, when the telegraph was changed to the Central Pacific, the fort was closed.

During the 1800s thousands of foreigners made their way to the many mining communities

that had cropped up across the Nevada territory. One of these communities was Berlin, founded in 1897, after silver was discovered, and then left a ghost town a decade later. Among the establishments that prospered for a short time there were an assay office, the Miner's Union Hall, an infirmary, a stable, and several saloons. Berlin also had a boardinghouse, single family dwellings, and a small school. Though the population was never more than a few hundred, life was good as long as the mines were good. But the output was poor. Subsistence pay and a failed miners' strike also added to the town's decline.

OREGON

Tall and stately, John McLoughlin, the Father of Oregon, was one of the class of important fur company administrators who lived in the Northwest in the early 1800s, when the region was the home to Indians and fur traders. Coming to the Hudson's Bay Company in 1821, he controlled hundreds of thousands of square miles of territory from California to Alaska. With a self-assurance bordering on the extreme, McLoughlin earned the respect of the Indians and generally managed to keep the peace. From his post at Vancouver he also aided settlers who came into the area by allowing them to use his boats, providing passage, and even giving them supplies. In 1846 McLoughlin retired from the company and moved to Oregon City, where his home soon became a hub of political activity.

A tiny stand of makeshift tents, set up by miners after gold was found here in 1851, marked the beginning of Jacksonville. But before long they were abandoned for sturdier structures. The Brunner Building opened in 1855 as a country store. Among the others were the 1861 Catholic Rectory and the 1863 Beekman Bank. Also found here were the 1855 McCully Building, a store that included a synagogue on its second floor, and the Sachs Brothers' Dry Goods Store, which heralded itself as the Temple of Fashion when it opened in 1861. In many ways, the most impressive residence was the 1890 Nunan House. A factory engineered marvel, it was ordered

from a catalogue and sent west in 137 crates. Also interesting were the 1883 stylized courthouse and the 1880 United States Hotel, which boasted President Rutherford B. Hayes among its guests. Then in 1884 the railroad skipped Jacksonville and the town went into a decline.

"From every man according to his capacity, to every man according to his needs." Such was the belief of William Kiel and his German followers, who founded Aurora in 1856. Soon the colony had houses, mills, barns, shops, a church, a hotel, and a heritage of music that included a band for adults, a band for boys, chamber orchestras, and vocal ensembles. But the colony thrived only while Kiel lived. After his death in 1877 the property was divided and the communal disbanded.

UTAH

Crowds stood by on May 10, 1869, as California governor Leland Stanford drove a golden spike into the last stretch of track at Promontory Summit to complete the transcontinental railway. A second swing at a second spike missed, but with hardly a pause, a telegrapher sent out the message "Done," and so set off celebrations across the country, including, in San Francisco, where a banner read, "California Annexes United States." Plans for a railway had been in the making since the 1830s, but not until 1862 did the government recognize the Union Pacific Railroad and give it permission to lay track from Nebraska westward. At the same time several California men organized the Central Pacific Railroad and began eastward. Work progressed rapidly as each company vied to get the full amount in government monies and land grants being given for each mile of track laid. Each of the crews confronted formidable challenges. Workers on the Central Pacific had to blast through mountains, while laborers on the Union Pacific had to fend off Indians. In the interim the individuals who had organized the companies became enormously wealthy, through corruption in some cases as was later found.

After the death of their prophet, Joseph Smith, in 1844, Mormons left Nauvoo, Illinois, and

began moving west. At the head of the first procession of 150 settlers was Brigham Young, their new leader. It had been Young's purpose to find a place where Mormons could practice their faith without persecution. On July 24, 1847, Young arrived at the Great Salt Lake Valley and proclaimed that this was the place. The first years were hard as settlers worked to bring water to the desert and find enough food for their families and the flood of new arrivals that came into the valley. One close call came in the spring of 1848, when thousands of crickets descended upon their crops. Then, from out of the distance, sea gulls appeared, and with their appetite for crickets, enough of the crop was saved to hold the settlers over that winter. In 1853 settlers began the construction of a new temple. Forty years later, the building with its six spires was completed. Also completed in 1867 was a new assembly hall or tabernacle as it was called.

WASHINGTON

A showdown had been in the making on San Juan Island since 1846, when an agreement supposedly set the western part of the boundary between the United States and Canada. The treaty was vague about whose sovereignty governed the island, which was located off the northwestern part of what is now Washington. Both governments claimed entitlement to the island and pressured their citizens to take possession of it. Tempers flared on June 15, 1859, when an American shot a Canadian-owned pig for digging in his garden. In turn British battleships were called out, troops were mustered, and the American fort was manned. Luckily, tensions eased before the Pig War got out of control, and soldiers stationed themselves at either end of the island for a long stay. In time the problem was taken to Kaiser Wilhelm of Germany for settlement. In 1872 he ruled in favor of the United States, thus bringing the conflict to an end.

In 1853 Henry Yesler, a newcomer from Ohio, set up a sawmill on the shores of the Puget Sound, expertly located to handle logs coming down a not too distant hill named Skid Road. Seattle had its genesis here, with timber, a principal source of income, being used for homes,

businesses, and even walkways, until 1889, when a blaze destroyed the heart of the center city. In the next ten years, engineers designed new buildings in brick and stone. Then in 1897 a second wave of good fortune swept through the area as thousands of prospectors made their way to the Klondike. After the rush, though, businesses began going elsewhere and the center city went into a decline. With brothels and bars everywhere, it gave new meaning to the expression Skid Road, or Row.

When medical doctor Marcus Whitman and his wife, Narcissa, an auburn-haired beauty, left the East in 1836 to found a Christian settlement in the Northwest, their zeal knew no end. The site they selected for their ministry was the home of the Cayuse Indians, near what is now Walla Walla. But after a decade of trying, the couple had made little headway in the Indians' religious conversion. In the interim the settlement had become a stopover for travelers on the Oregon Trail, and the influx of so many whites was also creating a concern among the Indians. Then in 1847 a wagon train carrying measles stopped and half the Cayuse died. Seeing that many whites survived while many of their own people died, the Indians concluded that they were being poisoned. Brandishing hatchets and carrying guns, the Cayuse shot and hacked to death the Whitmans and a dozen other people on November 29, 1847. Thereafter, the mission was closed.

WYOMING

Yellowstone was a two-million-acre swath of the Wyoming territory that was as spectacular in its beauty as it was in its expansiveness. It included hundred of geysers and thousands of hot springs. The Lower Falls of the Yellowstone River dropped hundreds of feet into the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone. At Mammoth Hot Springs more than seven hundred thousand gallons of water boiled out of the ground every day. The region was seen after 1807 by traders and trappers who returned with stories of sites that boggled the mind. Then in 1871 the United States government sent an exploratory party into the interior. Sure of Yellowstone's singularity as a

natural wonder, its members convinced Congress to safeguard the area as a preserve. Thus on March 1, 1872, Yellowstone became the nation's first national park.

South Pass City got its name from the not too distant South Pass, the place in the Rocky Mountains where the Oregon Trail made its appearance. Among the travelers who passed this way were Mormon settlers and California fortune seekers. Establishment of the town, though, did not occur until the 1867 discovery of gold here. The population soon grew to two thousand and included the likes of the famous. Calamity Jane, for example, resided locally, as did Polly Bartlett, an evil temptress who killed her suitors, then took their gold. But true pride was in the accomplishments of Esther Morris, the local purveyor of women's hats. According to lore, Esther Morris was instrumental in getting the two opposing candidates for the territorial legislature to agree to write a bill giving women their civil and political rights. When William Bright won the election, he kept his promise and got his fellow legislators to vote into law in 1869 the first piece of legislation anywhere, either foreign or domestic, to give women the right to vote and to hold public office. Within months, Morris became the territory's first female judge.

Independence Rock, a rest stop and registry for travelers on the Oregon Trail, was the unearthed top portion of a subterranean mountain, not far from what is now Casper. Covering twenty-five acres, its dome-like cap peaked at two hundred feet. Being in proximity to the Sweetwater River, and for settlers often ill from the alkaline water of the trail, it was a welcome relief. Thousands rested here, and most left some sign of their arrival on its sides. For some, like the local trappers, it was a place to leave messages. For others, like the explorer John C. Fremont, who left a cross, it was a religious experience. But most just left their names, or had the local stonecutters living nearby do it for them.

Sites of every kind were seen as settlers pushed west over the Great Divide to the shores of the Pacific Ocean. Those first to journey, and the multitudes who followed, found the American West to be an expanse of extreme differences in time, topography, and ways of life. From

remnants of the Russian fur trade in Alaska to Washington's Whitman Mission, the site of a horrific act, and Tombstone, Arizona, with its rough-and-ready past--all were part of the heritage of the West.

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